

As One

Music by Laura Kaminsky
Libretto by Mark Campbell and Kimberly Reed

Study Guide to the Opera



West Edge Opera, 2015. Dan Kempson and Brenda Patterson as Hannah before and after.
<http://www.laurakaminsky.com/as-one-reviews/>

Finding Myself

by Jill Leahy

Opera composers and librettists have often looked to the news in search of stories that could be transformed into a work of sung theater. While some of the most famous operas may seem to cover topics from an historical perspective, with settings in the past, it's important to understand that the subjects often actually reflected current experiences and situations of the era in which they were happening, but the strict censorship laws of the time required that reality be "disguised" to prevent retribution. The great opera scholar Fred Plotkin wrote, "Opera is about consideration of the human experience. Every human emotion and activity—love, lust, incest, hatred, fidelity, bravery, fear, humor—is enacted in opera. What we see in opera is ourselves, as long as we are honest enough to admit it."

For many audiences today, operas seem to be too long, and since they are usually sung in a foreign language, the result is that the drama of the human experience being portrayed is often lost to our modern ears. Composer Laura Kaminsky, co-librettists Mark Campbell and Kimberly Reed, and American Opera Projects have more than addressed these barriers in the opera *As One*. This chamber opera (short, staged on a smaller scale) is written and performed in English, its subject matter is timely and relevant, and the music is evocative as well as beautiful. It follows the character Hannah as she begins a journey of self-discovery, faces emotional truths most of us don't confront in our lives, and ultimately transitions into a life that finally feels right.

*"Two voices, one
human experience."
The Salt Lake Tribune*

As One's world premiere was September 4, 2014 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) Fisher Center, sung by mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke and her real-life husband, baritone Kelly Markgraf. The opera was directed by Ken Cazan, with music direction by Steven Osgood, featuring Utah-based ensemble Fry Street Quartet, and accompanying video projection by Kimberly Reed.

As One Synopsis

Setting: Small, unadorned stage
Timeframe: Current day

As One is a chamber opera in which two voices—Hannah after (mezzo-soprano) and Hannah before (baritone)—share the part of a sole transgender protagonist. Fifteen songs comprise the three-part narrative; with empathy and humor, they trace Hannah’s experiences from her youth in a small town to her college years on the West Coast, and finally to Norway where she is surprised at what she learns about herself.

Part I

In “Paper route,” Hannah rides her bike around her suburban neighborhood delivering newspapers, and revels in her more feminine impulses. Her youthful challenges in conforming to gender norms are related in “Cursive,” “Sex ed,” “Entire of itself,” and “Perfect boy”—in such disparate subjects as handwriting, sex, a John Donne poem, and exemplary male behavior. However, in “To know,” she discovers that she is not alone in the world and seeks understanding about herself at a local library.

Part II

During her college years, Hannah struggles with her bifurcated existence in “Two cities,” but also encounters the joy of being perceived as she wishes in “Three words.” In “Close,” she has made the decision to undergo hormone therapy and briefly suffers its vertiginous effects before feeling at one with her own body. “Home for the holidays,” “A Christmas story,” and “Dear son” all occur around the Christmas season and relate Hannah’s growing distance from her family and her past, which is countered by an immediate connection with a stranger in a local café. In “Out of nowhere,” Hannah escapes a harrowing assault that prompts her to find a link to the larger trans community and end her self-imposed alienation. Reacting to the conflicting voices in her head, she finally resolves to escape in the fragment, “I go on to...”

Part III

“Norway.” In this extended aria, Hannah finds, in Nature, solitude and self-reflection, the simple yet surprising equation that will help her achieve happiness.



Characters and Musicians

Hannah Before *baritone*
Hannah After *mezzo-soprano*
Character transitioning
from male to female

String Quartet



Sasha Cooke and Kelly Markgraf
with The Fry Street Quartet
2014 World Premiere
BAM Fisher Center, Brooklyn, NY



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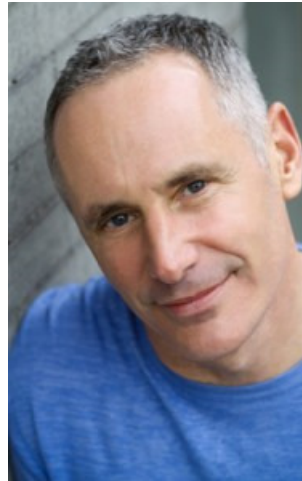
Meet the Composer

Laura Kaminsky (September 28, 1956) is an American composer, producer of musical and multi-disciplinary cultural events,

educator, and a native New Yorker. She graduated from Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music and Art, and then received her bachelor's degree *magna cum laude* from Oberlin College. She earned her master's degree from the City College of New York/CUNY in 1980, where she was a Tuch Foundation Fellow and studied with the Argentine-American composer Mario Davidovsky.

Social and political themes are common in her work, as is an abiding respect for and connection to the natural world. The *As One* team has since been commissioned twice—by Houston Grand Opera for a new work, *Some Light Emerges*, that will premiere in 2017, and by San Francisco's Opera Parallèle for *Today It Rains*, inspired by the life and work of Georgia O'Keeffe, for 2018–2019. Kaminsky has also received numerous grants, awards, and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, Koussevitzky Music Foundation, Opera America, Chamber Music America, and the Aaron Copland Fund. In addition to receiving six ASCAP-Chamber Music America Awards for Adventuresome Programming, she is currently composer-in-residence at American Opera Projects and is a member of the faculty in the School of the Arts/Conservatory of Music at Purchase College/SUNY, where she served as dean from 2004–2008. She also held the position of Director of Music and Theatre Programs at The New School in New York.

For more information about Laura Kaminsky visit www.laurakaminsky.com



Courtesy of Mark Campbell

Meet the Librettists

by Jill Leahy

Mark Campbell graduated as a Theater major from the University of Colorado in 1975. His lyrics for musicals had some early success, including an award from Stephen Sondheim. In 2004 he teamed with composer John Musto on his first full-length opera, *Volpone*, which the *Washington Post* deemed “a masterpiece.”

Campbell is one of the most in-demand librettists in contemporary opera, profiled in *Opera News* as an artist “poised to become a major force in opera in the coming decade.” Although Campbell has written more than 15 librettos, his most-known opera is *Silent Night*, which garnered the 2012 Pulitzer Prize in Music.

For a complete biography, list of awards and upcoming works, visit www.markcampbellwords.com



Photo: *The New York Times*

Kimberly Reed studied cinema at UC Berkeley (B.A.) and San Francisco State University (M.A.), worked as a commercial editor, traveled the world directing travel documentaries, and became an expert in the nascent field of digital filmmaking and post-production. But then she

transitioned genders and did what transsexuals are encouraged to do: She disappeared. Sequestering herself in the publishing world, she applied her filmmaking knowledge to her position as editor-in-chief of *Digital Video Magazine*. Her documentary film, *Prodigal Sons*, was described as a “whiplash doc [that] heralds an exciting talent” by *SF Weekly* and marked her coming-out, in more ways than one.

As co-librettist for *As One*, Kimberly Reed drew on her own experience of gender transitioning and was able to provide personal insights that helped her co-librettist and the composer more realistically portray the pivotal moments in the inner life of the single character they named Hannah.

For more information about Kimberly Reed visit <http://prodigalsonsfilm.com/drupal/creative-team>

Terminology from the National Center for Transgender Equality



Transgender: A term for people whose gender identity, expression, or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth. Transgender is a broad term and is good for non-transgender people to use. "Trans" is shorthand for transgender.

(NOTE: Transgender is correctly used as an adjective, not a noun, thus "transgender people" is appropriate but "transgenders" is often viewed as disrespectful.)

Transgender Man: A term for a transgender individual who currently identifies as a man.

Transgender Woman: A term for a transgender individual who currently identifies as a woman.

Gender Identity: An individual's internal sense of being male, female, or something else. Since gender identity is internal, one's gender identity is not necessarily visible to others.

Gender Expression: How a person represents or expresses one's gender identity to others, often through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, voice, or body characteristics.

Cross-dresser: A term for people who dress in clothing traditionally or stereotypically worn by the other sex, but who generally have no intent to live full-time as the other gender. The older term "transvestite" is considered derogatory by many in the United States.

Queer: A term used to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and often also transgender people. Some use queer as an alternative to "gay" in an effort to be more inclusive. Depending on the user, the term has either a derogatory or an affirming connotation, as many have sought to reclaim the term that was once widely used in a negative way.

Sexual Orientation: A term describing a person's attraction to members of the same sex and/or a different sex, usually defined as lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, or asexual.

Sex Reassignment Surgery: Surgical procedures that change one's body to better reflect a person's gender identity. This may include different procedures, including those sometimes referred to as "top surgery" (breast augmentation or removal) or "bottom surgery" (altering genitals). Contrary to popular belief, there is not one surgery; in fact there are many different surgeries. These surgeries are medically necessary for some people, however not all people want, need, or can have surgery as part of their transition. "Sex change surgery" is considered a derogatory term by many.

Transition: The time when a person begins living as the gender with which they identify rather than the gender they were assigned at birth, which often includes changing one's first name and dressing and grooming differently. Transitioning may or may not also include medical and legal aspects, including taking hormones, having surgery, or changing identity documents (e.g. driver's license, Social Security record) to reflect one's gender identity. Medical and legal steps are often difficult for people to afford.

<http://www.transequality.org/issues/resources/transgender-terminology>

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